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NSC STAFF FOR SINGH

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/16/2016
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KIRF](#) [ASEC](#) [EG](#)
SUBJECT: EGYPT: SECTARIAN VIOLENCE IN ALEXANDRIA

REF: 05 CAIRO 8139

Classified by ECPO Counselor John P. Desrocher for reasons
1.4 (b) and (d).

¶11. (C) Summary: Attacks on Friday, April 14 against worshipers in three separate Alexandria churches killed one elderly Christian, wounded more than a dozen others and sparked a weekend of unrest. Clashes continued at a lower tempo on April 16 and the death that day of a Muslim injured April 15 may spur yet more violence. The GOE sought to downplay the incidents, attributing the April 14 attacks to a single crazed individual, but has also initiated a major security operation to contain fallout from the violence. Official Coptic Orthodox Church reaction has been muted, but independent Christian analysts have harshly criticized the GOE, suggesting that a larger conspiracy involving multiple attackers was at work. The Muslim Brotherhood has disassociated itself from the violence. These latest attacks in Alexandria, which come six months after riots sparked by Muslim protests over an allegedly blasphemous play produced by an Alexandria church (reftel), are a reminder of the sectarian tensions that continue to plague Egypt. End summary.

¶12. (C) Media accounts and statements by GOE security officials about the April 14 incidents have sometimes conflicted, but it now appears that the attacker(s) targeted three Alexandria churches: the Church of the Great Martyr St. George in the Hadara district; the Church of the Two Saints in Sidi Bishr; and the Church of the Virgin in Janaklis. According to a chronology issued by the Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate in Alexandria, the three attacks occurred at 0800, 0930, and 1010, respectively. It was the 0930 attack at Two Saints Church in Sidi Bishr that resulted in the death of 78-year-old Noshi Atta Guirgis. After the attacks, the police arrested 25-year-old Mahmud Salaheddin Abdul Razzak, and charged him with the attacks. Comment: While it was physically possible for one attacker to conduct all three attacks, many observers have expressed skepticism that one person acted alone. This skepticism has been reinforced by media reports attributed to unnamed police sources which have blamed at least two assailants. End comment.

¶13. (C) The Saturday, April 15 funeral for Noshi Atta Guirgis sparked additional protests and violence, as Coptic protesters clashed with Muslims. Both sides threw stones and set fire to several vehicles before police clamped down, arresting more than a dozen people from both sides. Note: Embassy Cairo's RSO office has maintained regular contact with Egyptian law enforcement since the beginning of the strife. The information provided by the GOE officials to post has mirrored the confused and sometimes contradictory information available in the media. End note.

¶4. (C) Violence continued at a somewhat lower tempo on April 16 despite a very heavy security presence. That same day a Muslim injured in the April 15 mayhem died of his wounds; his funeral (not yet scheduled) may spark further violence. Likewise, on April 21 the traditional Muslim prayer day will coincide with Coptic Good Friday; this will bring out large crowds of worshipers from both communities and again increase the possibility of clashes.

¶5. (C) Alexandria Governor Abdel Salam Mahgoub's statement blaming the attacks on a single crazed individual and initially claiming that Guirgis died of "shock," which closely tracked with the initial statements by the Ministry of Interior, were met with considerable derision by many media commentators as well as Coptic Orthodox activists. Although the Coptic Orthodox leadership in Cairo has not yet issued any public statements on the events, Church officials in Alexandria have criticized what they characterized as a GOE effort to downplay the violence. Expatriate Coptic Orthodox commentators have seized upon the Alexandria violence as evidence that the GOE fails to protect the rights of Egypt's Christian citizens. Muslim Brotherhood spokesman Essam El-Erian, in an effort to disassociate his organization from the violence, has also charged that the GOE had been remiss in its duty to protect the Alexandria churches.

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